

TO TWEAK OR NOT TO TWEAK?

CAN YOU BE
FUNDAMENTALLY
HAPPY WITH
YOURSELF BUT
STILL WANT
FILLERS? YES,
SAYS SENIOR
BEAUTY EDITOR
ALEXANDRA
FRIEND...

The problem with fillers and Botox is that they pretend not to have happened,' says Dr Meredith Jones, reader in gender and media studies at Brunel University and director of the Global Lives Research Centre.

I'm poking thoughtfully

at the tip of my chin, currently plumped up with just under half a teaspoon of injectable hyaluronic acid (HA). 'I'd never judge a woman for having work done; what irks me is the hypocrisy. You haven't just been doing yoga and staying hydrated, you've had filler. Time to come clean,' she says. I like Dr Jones; she's smart and wholehearted, with cobalt-blue hair and a wry Instagram feed. So here goes. I'm Alex, senior beauty editor at *Red*, and I have 3ml of filler (so still less than a teaspoon) in my chin, jaw and cheekbones, the tiniest amount of Botox between my brows and some Profhilo (an extra-liquid form of HA, used to hydrate skin from the inside out) injected into 10 strategic points across my face. I look like me but less tired and less cross, I think. *Red's* health director thinks I've been on holiday – 'It's filler!' I bellow down the corridor after her because, like Dr Jones, I believe it would be duplicitous not to. I've just never come out in print before.

A couple of years ago, I'd have called tweakments an own goal that would bite women on the collective bum when we found ourselves judged against unrealistic beauty standards we'd helped to perpetuate. Then (overnight, it seemed) the bones in my face started shrinking and the nicely rounded fat pads under my skin weren't quite so round and fat any more. I looked sad even when I wasn't and (surprise!) I wasn't nearly as into the ageing process as I once had been. So I found myself at Medicetics Skin Clinic under the care of Dr Vicky Dondos. Chic and thoughtful in pleated skirt and heels, Dondos appeals to (her words) conflicted women. Clever, confident women who, in their 20s and early 30s, thought they'd never go under the needle yet, 10 years later, are in her treatment room wondering whether or not they should be. 'I'm not a psychologist but that conflict is as much part of the ageing process as the ageing itself. This is a complex and personal decision, which for many feels like a Damascene moment. I get it; it's messy.'

In 2016, *Red* asked readers how they felt about cosmetic intervention. A third had tried Botox and 20% had dabbled in filler, and I suspect numbers have



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swelled since, in line with predictions that the British market in non-surgical procedures will be worth more than £3bn in the next five years*. Tweakments aren't going anywhere, though we know from a handful of emails that some *Red* readers wished they were, the argument being that only those lacking in self-confidence would meddle with their faces in such an intrusive way. I don't know about that: at 45, I'm better at speaking my mind, at leaving parties early and at wearing the bikinis I didn't in my 20s (despite my C-section pouch). I'd just rather do it with a face that looks as vibrant as I feel on the inside. But that's my face and my path, and I can honestly say I've never looked at another woman and thought they'd look better for a bit of Botox.

Ateh Jewel, beauty writer, friend of *Red* and utter joy to be around, first tried injectables a couple of years ago when a weight loss of 4st left her with lines she'd never seen before. 'I've had months with and months without and although I think I look better after a little "tweak", I feel the same either way,' she says. 'My family, friendships and career give me purpose; does it matter whether a bit of Botox gives me an extra bounce in my step?'

'IT'S A COMPLEX AND PERSONAL DECISION'

In research commissioned by SK:N skin clinics, more than 2,000 adults were asked which grooming procedures helped them to feel better in themselves. Anti-ageing injectables ranked highly, but so did having freshly washed hair and a tan. Beauty is a sliding scale, with shampoo at one end, a full-face lift at the other and, in the middle, everything from glycolic peels to acupuncture facials. Where we draw the line is a personal issue and, as Dr Jones observes, there's barely a woman on earth who does absolutely nothing. 'Ultimately, it would be really nice if we could live with our bodies in ways that were about playfulness and fun. If that were the case, we'd probably be going about covered in glitter rather than having Botox, but when it comes to the crunch, every woman has to decide what's right for her,' she says. Injectables aren't for everyone; some of the most beautiful women I know are decades older than me and look utterly glorious without a spec of intervention. Maybe that's where I'll end up, too – my 3ml of hyaluronic acid is not a lifelong commitment. But ask me whether I want to make that change right now and, well, I'll get back to you. I hope you won't judge in the meantime...